

## **Fistful of Sand** by reluctantladyknight

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**Summary:**

Richie Tozier, despite being fairly popular, spent a lot of time looking at Eddie Kaspbrak. It's not like he ever thought Eddie was looking back. Until he gets a certain letter in the mail.

Or: To All the Boys I've Loved Before AU

## 1. 'Tis But A Brief Prolouge

Richie remembers the day he properly met Stanley Uris. Stan was sitting on the floor of Peter Gordon's bathroom looking like he was having a stroke while "Uptown Funk" played at full volume outside the door. He looked like he's been crying, and Richie couldn't stand the thought of leaving him there. So he stayed.

The memory of meeting Mike is less defined because he's known Mike longer. Richie had been fucking around in the Barrens, when Mike came running into sight, looking like he'd seen a ghost. Of course, he was running from Henry Bowers; anyone in their right mind would, especially if he came at them with a knife.

And although Richie met Eddie Kaspbrak so many fucking years ago, he could remember it like it was yesterday. Richie was having an argument with Harry Dunning about who had the earliest memory when he noticed this kid. He was sitting in the back, not doing anything in particular, just...looking at everyone. Despite being in second grade, he was still noticeably short, with brown freckles splattered on his face. His being alone made Richie sad, so Richie left Harry to his own devices and sat down next to him.

"Hello, I'm Richie Tozier, pleased to meetcha," Richie said. The kid looked at him, startled, before he looked Richie up and down, with his cheeks flushing slightly pink. Richie decided then and there that he wanted this boy, whoever he was, to wear that blush all. Day. Long. The kid still wasn't saying anything, though, so Richie pulled out his newest bragging-worthy fact. "I can remember the days when I was a baby," he said, tilting his chin up just a bit.

Cutie's eyebrows pulled together, forming this tiny little scrunch on his forehead. Cute, cute, cute. "Oh yeah?" he asked. "Well, I can remember being in my mom's belly."

Richie thought about that. Hard to beat, he had to admit. But then something popped into his mind, pop! Perfect.

"Cool! So we both have something in common, then." Richie said. When Shortstack cocked his head to one side in question, Richie

grinned. "We've both been inside your mom!"

Richie remembers laughing his little ass off when the kid pushed him away in disgust, making his way towards the reading nook. "Ah, come on!" Richie called after him. "At least tell me your name, cutie!"

He turned to look at Richie, his nose all wrinkled up. "I'll tell you my name, but only if you never call me that again." When Richie merely looked at him, waiting, he sighed. "It's Eddie," he said quietly, before turning and continued on his way.

Richie smiled to himself, satisfied, before going back to Harry. Yet still, later that night, he thought about the cute little boy named Eddie he met that day, and how he couldn't wait to make him turn pink all over again.

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Second grade came and went. Richie still saw Eddie around, but he was either working or talking with his friend, Bill Denbrough. Richie didn't know Bill too well, but seeing them together, laughing, caused a pang to go off in Richie's chest that he couldn't describe.

Richie, had friends, of course. By third grade, he had eight of them. Betty, Arthur, Bob, Gard, Max, Ellie, Ralph, and Steve were all fun to play with, but sometimes Richie would see Eddie and Bill on the playground and he would want to play with them more than anything. He especially wanted to know what Bill did to make Eddie laugh like that, like it was the funniest thing he'd ever heard.

On the last day of school, they got their yearbooks. Richie didn't like his picture or the idea that anyone who held on to their yearbooks in the future could look at it whenever they wanted to. He thought it made him look like a beaver, just like Patrick from the fifth grade said. But he still liked how new the yearbook smelled and looked, and how many people came up to him asking him to sign theirs.

Richie was going to start his summer off right. He and Bob were going to hang out at Ralph's house before going to see a showing of *The Goonies* at the Aladdin. He was swinging his backpack over his shoulder, removing his bike from the stand when he heard a little noise behind him; he turned.

And who was there but Eddie Kaspbrak. He was staring up at Richie with those pretty brown eyes, hugging his yearbook to his chest. After a few seconds of both of them just staring at each other, Richie cleared his throat.

"You wanna say somethin' to me, Eddie Spaghetti?" he asked.

"Don't call me that," he muttered. He hugged his yearbook closer, and his next words tumbled out of his mouth so quickly Richie very nearly didn't catch them.

"Doyouwannamaybesignmyyearbook?" Eddie asked. There was that blush again! The color of bright, luscious strawberries, it seemed it's main purpose was to lure Richie's grin out from wherever it hid during the bad days. Not that the last day of school could ever be a bad day, it was just that no one had made him smile yet, at least not as wide.

"Sure," Richie said brightly. He fumbled around his jean pockets for a pen, before Eddie held out a green one he was gripping tightly in his right hand. Richie had taken it and opened Eddie's yearbook to the first page and frowned. There were only a few signatures from teachers, and Bill of course.

Did people just not know where to sign these days? Richie thought everyone knew you were supposed to sign on the opening pages, where the first piece of paper was glued to the back of the hardcover. Richie chose not to comment on it, and instead had uncapped the pen with his teeth (gifting Richie once again with that cute little forehead scrunch), and written as follows:

*Eddie, my good sir:  
If I may infer,  
You depart for camp during the summer  
And I hope good times do occur!*

*Your pal, Rich*

Richie handed the yearbook back to him and watched as Eddie attempted to hide the growing smile on his face. Alas, Richie had four eyes, as Patrick's friend Henry often liked to point out, so there was no hiding that amused look in Eddie's eyes from him.

Although Eddie still acted grossed out when Richie tried to give him back his pen, and that at least didn't seem like an act.

"You put that in your mouth," he exclaimed.

"So?"

"Do you know how much bacteria reside in the human mouth?" Eddie demanded. When Richie shrugged, Eddie gaped before shaking his head and saying, "You can keep it."

Richie chuckled, and after ruffling Eddie's hair, hopped onto his bike and made to leave. "You're adorable," Richie told him, and rode off, leaving a very stunned and very red Eddie Kaspbrak on the curb.

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When Richie finally got into middle school, he couldn't be happier. Not that he hadn't enjoyed some good moments in elementary school, it was just that he thought everyone could take him seriously now.

"That'll be the day," Richie remembers his mom joking over dinner. And, turns out, she'd been right. Attending sixth grade hadn't unlocked "Serious Richie," much to his parents' dismay and his friends' amusement. Not to mention middle school kind of sucked.

Everyone in his grade seemed to turn meaner overnight, and the worst part was Richie himself couldn't claim to be above them all; he was surprised to find himself snapping at adults more often, and being excited over talking trash and spreading rumors.

The best year of middle school for him by far was seventh grade. He

got more friends, and his grades were doing okay. He even kissed someone for the first time. Lace and him were forced into “seven minutes in heaven” during a Halloween “get-together” (it was too lame, and, well, middle school to be called a party).

“We don’t have to do anything if you don’t want to,” he whispered into the dark. Richie wasn’t sure why he was whispering; their friends were downstairs and had reluctantly promised not to listen in.

“No, no,” Lace replied. “I kinda want to...do you?” Richie shrugged, even though he knew she couldn’t see it.

“Alright.”

It was awkward, to say the least. Their teeth bumped into each other, and Richie knew his lips were chapped, because goddamnit, he hadn’t been expecting to be having his first kiss tonight, ok?

When the seven minutes were up, their friends whooped and applauded them as he helped Lace out of the cramped coat closet. She gave him a shy smile and they shared looks with each other the rest of the get-together (hangout?).

Dating Lace was weird. They kissed a lot, and they did get better at it eventually. By spring, Richie even felt confident enough to give her a hickey, a small one on her neck; Bowers gave her hell for it, called her a slut, and Richie never did it again.

In seventh grade, three extraordinary things happened. Three things so rare, so unheard of, and yet so great. The first happened in April. In April, Richie saw Eddie Kaspbrak at a hangout™. That's right, he was so trademarking that shit.

Even now, Richie couldn’t stop looking at Eddie, even after years had passed, even when he started dating Lace. There was just something about him. He still hung out with Bill Denbrough, and Beverly Marsh, now, Lace’s cousin, who smoked cigarettes in back alleys and painted her nails with a different sparkly color every week.

Anyways, the main thing that happened this hangout (they still

couldn't really be classified as parties) was the game of spin the bottle. When Ev finished his 7UP, Betty squealed and insisted everyone had to play. So they all sat in a circle and held bated breath as Betty took her hands off the now moving glass bottle. It landed on Richie first. Of course, it did.

"Well, which one of you lucky people is going to give me a smooch?" Richie looked around while raising his eyebrows. Lace rolled her eyes next to him.

"Shut it, Tozier," she said, shoving him playfully. Richie looked over and cocked an eyebrow.

"Aaawww, you jealous, babe?"

That was the moment Betty spun the bottle again. That was the moment everyone stopped talking, held their breath again.

Richie looked up, wanting to see who the lucky dame would be, and he saw alright. He saw Eddie's wide eyes and the mouth of the bottle as it landed on him.

"We could spin again?" Richie heard Betty suggest from somewhere. He heard his reply, too.

"Why?" His eyes were still on Eddie's. Eddie's eyes were still on the ground. He made himself tear away and look at Betty with a fake teasing look in his eye. "Nothing wrong with a little boy on boy."

He heard Eddie's sound of disgust and looked back at him. Eddie looked at the floor. He heard Ellie pipe up. "He's right, Betty. We shouldn't change the rules."

He leaned across the circle towards Eddie, which made him look up, finally, finally, making eye contact with Richie. His eyes were still beautiful and brown. He still had that mole under his left eye. Richie felt himself smirk. "You scared, Eddie Spaghetti?" And Eddie's eyes narrowed.

"Don't call-" Eddie's words were muffled by the feeling of Richie's lips on his. Richie was glad he was experienced in the art of kissing because Eddie certainly wasn't. He hardly kissed back, and when he

did he was all off-kilter. Richie didn't want to make their kiss look like a total shitshow when everyone was right there.

When it ended, Richie's head was buzzing, and he hardly noticed Eddie and Lace sharing glares with each other the rest of the night.

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The next two extraordinary things actually happened the summer following seventh grade, but it still counted as seventh grade in Richie's book. The second needed little explanation. It was him meeting Mike. Mike was kind, tough, and nerdy above all else. Richie felt he could be himself around him in a way he never felt around his other friends. They spent most of the summer together, getting ice cream, having bike races, or helping around at Mike's farm. A lot of his friends were away on vacation, and while Richie still texted them, it was nice to have Mike around.

The third extraordinary thing, Richie, fortunately, wasn't around to witness. Basically, Henry Bowers killed his Dad. Hey, Richie's not saying he takes any joy out of murder, but not only did this rid the town of a very bad police chief, but it also rid the town of a bullying psychopath, as Bowers was arrested and put into some mental health facility afterward.

Richie was just glad he would never have to see the horrified expression on Mike's face again.

There's a lot of things that happen in between. He and Lace break up, get back together, break up, get back together again. He meets Stan sophomore year, of course, and his nerdy-ness rivals Mike's, but he fits into the whole friend dynamic rather well.

But by far the biggest thing is the letter Richie receives in the mail, junior year.



## 2. Capítulo Numero Uno

### Summary for the Chapter:

School starts, relationships end, and Richie and Stan hang out.

However, approximately one week before Richie gets the note in the mail, it's the second to last day of summer. He doesn't know how to put into words how angry he feels about this. Not to mention it was sun showering. Jesus Christ, was his approaching death at the hands of college touring and SAT prep not enough, he had to endure just enough rain to keep him from going outside, and yet just enough sun to bake him alive in his house?

And, as if the day wasn't already terrible, Stan, the bird-loving shit, had to go and make it worse somehow.

"Do you think we'll keep in touch?" Stan quietly asks.

"Hm?" They're in Richie's room, fans at full blast so they tousle the pages of the book they're reading. Richie would have been fine with comics, honestly, but when Stan found out Richie still hadn't done his summer reading, he insisted that they spend the night trying to get through "The Scarlet Letter" together.

"After high school graduation...do you think we'll stay friends?" Richie gives him one of his signature *are you serious* looks.

"That's, like, practically two years away, man." Yet Stan still won't let go of that nervous look in his eyes. "Come on, we don't have to worry about that until senior year at the latest."

Stan snaps the book shut and huffs, shoving it into the dark abyss that is the inside of his messenger bag. "You didn't answer my question." Okay, now it's getting serious if Stan is throwing aside schoolwork (just thinking the word causes an uncomfortable pain to emerge in Richie's stomach) to talk.

"Okay, what brought this all on? Was it Mike? It was probably Mike."

Richie shoots the sentences out of his mouth, straight towards Stan, like a cannon; Stan was the one who always said he could never shut up.

“No, it was not Mike.” A sigh. “Believe it or not, I am a human being capable of this thing called thinking? Although I shouldn’t be surprised you’ve never heard of it.”

“Oh, haha.” Richie says. He gets stopped in his tracks by the expression on Stan’s face. Hint: it isn’t a happy one. “Alright, you want a straight answer? Of course we fucking will. We’re gonna get out of this shit town, and we’re gonna move off to cool colleges, we’ll face-time, we’ll meet up in whatever flashy cities we’re living in, and when I become famous-”

“Like that’s ever going to happen,” Stan rolls his eyes. Richie creeps in close to him, throws an arm around his shoulders.

“When I become famous, I’ll dedicate all the awards I win to you. Well, some of them. Maybe one or two?”

Stan shoves Richie off, grabs his bag, and pushes himself off the bed. Richie frowns. He would never let them grow apart. Ever. So why didn’t Stan believe that? Before Stan could stop him, he unplugged the fan and held it behind his back as he naruto ran to block the door.

Stan gave him a death glare that could stab Richie in the back ten times. “What the hell are you doing.”

“Say you’ll face time me every Tuesday when we get to college.”

“What.”

Richie gives him a dramatic sigh as he slips into his Southern Bell voice. “Please, oh please, say it, Mistuh Uris, before we both die in this sweaty, hot as hell room.”

“We wouldn’t have to die if you hadn’t unplugged the fan!”

Richie said nothing, just smirked at him until Stan sat down on the bed again in a resigned sort of way. “I’ll face time you every Tuesday

when we get to college,” he muttered.

“Louder!”

“I’ll... face time you every Tuesday when we go to college?”

“I can’t HEEAAR YOU!” Richie yelled, sort of going for a Captain-From-The-Spongebob-Intro impression. Stan raised one eyebrow. Fuck, how did he do that so perfectly smooth?

“I’m not saying that any louder. Your parents are at home.” Richie pouted, but accepted his fate and plugged the fan back in.

“Fine. I was about to pass out anyway.”

He flopped down on the bed beside Stan, making a loud *whump* as the mattress absorbed his weight. It was a bad night all around. With the overhead lights Stan insisted on keeping on, you could see Richie’s room and all its impurities; the curled, frayed corners of the posters covering his walls, and creeping up to the ceiling, the burn from a cigarette butt on the striped shag rug, all the small holes in the wall where he’d put a pushpin to hang something up instead of just taping it.

Whilst Richie was scolding his nine-year-old self for wanting to have a more stable Batman poster, Stan moved towards the window left of his desk, peered outside through the cracks in the shades. He looked down at Richie.

“Can I open this?” Stan asked, gesturing towards the window. Richie sat up.

“Knock yourself out.”

He watched as Stan pulled up the black window shades, and pushed up against the upper glass. The barrier between the room and the air outside was broken as that summer smell, something that could only be described as fresh and humid, wafted in; with it, voices, and loud ones at that.

“-so embarrassing, you made me look like the bad guy!”

“Oh, I embarrassed you? You know how h-hard that was?”

“You shouldn’t have done it in from of them!”

“W-was I s-supposed to magically know you were going to b-break up with me?”

Well, this sounded interesting. Richie got up and moved across the room, stood next to Stan to watch the two people arguing in the street. It wasn’t until they moved a bit to get under the orange street lamps, Richie could see who they were, although he kinda already knew. Big Bill Denbrough and Audra Phillips.

Swore on his heart and hope to die, Richie knew that his immediate reaction to learning Debrough was dating Audra Phillips was kinda messed up. Richie was relieved because he’d secretly always thought Eddie and Bill had a thing going. Course, who was to say whether they were dating; in a town like Derry, gay couples didn’t advertise to the world they were even gay, much less in a relationship. Besides, Eddie and Bill weren’t popular enough for people to care. But a part of Richie had always wondered.

He knew he didn’t have any right to feel that possessive over Eddie, a boy he’d had six full conversations with, tops, and shared a kiss with once in middle school. Not to mention Rich had a girlfriend. It was almost embarrassing that he was still dating his middle school girlfriend, but now that he and Lace were older, they could do more than just kiss.

Oh, get your mind out of the gutter. He meant to go on actual dates. He didn’t know what he’d do without Lace, but can Richie say something? God, he’s even nervous to say it in his head. Lately, he’d started to want to know.

Richie was still very sure his assumptions were correct, however, when he saw Eddie, Bill, and Audra hanging out by the bleachers, Richie would see this look on Eddie’s face when he was looking at Audra and Bill next to him, that Richie knew all too well. It was the look he gave both Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley when watching Pirates of the Caribbean for the first time in kindergarten.

He knew Eddie couldn't be jealous of Audra, obviously, because he and Audra were practically siblings at that point, so it would've been...a bit weird, to say the least, and would have lowered Richie's opinion of him by, like 30%. They became legally bound siblings a year later when Eddie here got adopted.

Moral of the story is: things end. Even love. Especially love.

Richie studied the pair of them now, and before he could hear any more, Stan shut the window quickly and quietly. Richie looked over at him.

"Wouldn't have pegged you as an eavesdropper."

Stan blinked and looked down at his clean sneakers with the white socks pulled above the ankles. "I'm not, I just... there was something about them I-"

"Couldn't look away from?" Richie guessed. He knew what he meant. It was like a car crash on the side of the highway. You knew you should just look ahead and keep on driving, but there was always the curious part of you that wanted to see more, know more. About who the drivers were, and what caused the crash. Or break up in this case.

Perhaps, in this situation, it was the fact that you knew you were seeing the connection between two human beings split, being cut like a string. Snip, snip, snip.

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Here's a math equation for you, since if Richie has to do math again, so do you:

If Richie + First Day Back at School = Bad Mood

What does Richie + First Day Back at School + Breaking Up with his Girlfriend + Nearly Getting Hit by a Car equal?

Spoiler alert: it rhymes with Richie being fucking kissed cough. He knows that doesn't really make any sense, but he couldn't care less right now.

The day certainly started off shitty, because Richie started it off late to class on the first day of school, mind you, making his way through the hallways of Derry High School, looking for Steve, who had suddenly disappeared off the face of the earth. He owed Richie twenty bucks (preferably in five-dollar bills) for that breakfast they'd had at the diner last Friday, which Richie needed right now because he really wanted a bag of Doritos from the vending machine by the band rooms.

Ok, so he was kind of just looking for a way to avoid going to French class, which he'd flunked last year, by the way. But he also hadn't had breakfast due to sleeping in, which made him late to school already, and you know what they say. What goes around comes around, or whatever.

Richie turned the corner into the Math hallway, pushed past people on their way to class when he came across...what's this? Who was it, but his three favorite people, Bevvie, Eddie, and Lacie, all in one place! Lacie had her back turned to him, but he could see Eddie, face adorned with his signature scowl, and Beverly, with her arm around Eddie's shoulder and a smile that didn't reach her eyes.

It was easy to assume that, based on Lacie's usual interactions with her cousin, and of course Eddie's usual attitude towards her the few times they interacted, they were having another stupid argument. This was only confirmed by Lacie saying "You know what, Eddie, screw you, my feet are always cold."

Richie cringed and walked up beside her before one of them murdered the other. "Hey, how are ya?" He doesn't direct the question specifically towards any of them, mostly because he doesn't want them to answer.

She moved her head to look up at him and smiled. "Hey." Richie could practically feel the eye rolls from Beverly and Eddie directed towards them, which was understandable given that they were pissed off, Richie reminded himself. Lacie had a tendency to do that to

Eddie, and her rivalry with Beverly was natural given the whole them being related thing, he supposed.

“So, I was just complimenting Beverly here on her government-issued boots,” Lace said. Case in point. “I’m gonna go walk with Ronan to class.” And without another word, she walked off.

He’s left to rub the back of his neck and stare apologetically at the pair of them. They both stare at Richie, as if waiting for him to leave, which, honestly? Fair.

“Sorry about her, I think she’s going on a diet or something.” Which is half true. She did say something about wanting to lay off Starbucks, but everyone knows she’s always like this towards the both of them.

Beverly raises an eyebrow at him and Richie feels himself blush. “You sure there isn’t just some chemical imbalance in her brain?”

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At the end of the day he feels so put out, yet classes are done now. He can go home, and for a few hours, cherish the freedom he’s given, maybe hang out with Ralph or Stan later. Richie runs against the door to push himself into the summer air (because summers not done yet, thank god), and as he makes his way towards his truck, he starts to think he can make this day just the littlest bit better. The next thing he knows, a white Subaru is backing up towards his right side before stopping abruptly.

It nearly gives Richie a heart attack, a good way of snapping him out of his post-school haze, but he still feels anger rise up to his chest like it’s going to shoot out at the driver at any moment. He comes around to the driver's door to rant, and the window rolls down, it’s Eddie, because why the fuck not. It couldn’t be someone he would feel justified being pissed off at, like fucking Victor Criss.

“You know you’re supposed to look behind you when backing out,

right? It's this thing we do, so people in parking lots don't die," Richie tells him. Eddie just looks straight ahead, pink in his cheeks like there always seems to be.

"Yeah, well I'm new at driving, asshole, so cut me some slack." Eddie snaps back, sounding restrained.

"Seeing as how you could have killed me, I don't think I will."

Eddie turns to him, looking embarrassed, but still angry, somehow. What would he be mad at Richie at, he didn't do anything!

"Oh, shut up. Even if I hadn't stopped in time, the worst you could've had was some minor injuries to your ribs and maybe a concussion, based on the speed I was going," Eddie still talks a mile a minute, Richie noted. Nice to know some things haven't changed since grade school. He grinned.

"Sure you don't want me to drive you home?" When Eddie stares, Richie says quickly, "Just, you know, for the general safety of others."

Eddie's lips fall to a flat line, and Richie watches as he swallows, brushes some of his hair out from the front of his face, and looks ahead.

"No, think I'm good, think I can get out okay, so you should leave..." Eddie closes his eyes tight, and out of the corner of his eye, Richie sees his hands grip the steering wheel harder. "Seriously...just leave." Richie gives him a dazzling smile and a mock salute.

"Whatever you say, Eds."

And as Richie's walking away he feels the last of that anger from before melt like butter when he hears Eddie say, "Don't call me Eds, dipshit."

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Richie doesn't smoke when Lace is around.

He could tell some excuse about how she doesn't like it, but it's a bit more complicated than that, and that's not even true. She joked about kissing an ashtray and all, but nothing beyond that.

It is more his choice, really. Lace was so lenient with his smoking, and he doesn't want to admit he wishes she wasn't. That she cared just a bit more to say, "Hey, Tozier, maybe you should stop that before it kills you." He's probably just being picky. Like his mother used to say when he didn't read any of the books he got for his birthday after reading the first page.

"You can't judge a book that way Richard, just look beyond that."

"You can't judge a girl that way, Richard, just look beyond that."

So he doesn't smoke when she's around, pretending it's because he's polite. On the sidewalk on West Broadway Street, watching the last of the sunlight disappear, he snorts to himself. Polite. Right. Like he's ever been polite.

Richie is not sure whether or he can go into Lace's house again and pretend everything's fine when it isn't. He walks on to the wraparound porch and rings the doorbell anyway.

He has always loved Lace's bedroom, even when she burned all those sickly sweet candles from Anthropology, or cleaned the room so it would be rid of her little notebooks and sweatshirts scattered on the floor. They lay in the safety and comfort of it for a long while after school, not saying anything at all. Richie would play with her hair until she'd turn over on her back, then towards him. Lace would look into his eyes and search for something that Richie didn't think was there anymore, until he looked away. He was always the first to look away.

Finally, Lace seems to get sick of this, because she lets out a tired exhale and slumps up against the end of the bed. Her voice is small, nearly enveloped in the silence of the room. "I think we should take a break."

And there they are. The words that have been on the tip of his tongue

since May. He starts to say something, a question, or maybe an answer until she interrupts. "Let me finish, please." She looks over at him with those resigned eyes, shiny with tears at the edges. He stays quiet.

"Listen, Chee, I...I'm really sorry, but I ..." Lace lets out a shuddering breath before continuing. "I just can't do this anymore," she whispers.

Richie smiles and presses his lips into her hair. He cradles the back of her neck and just says, "I understand." Because he does. Because he's tired too, maybe even more than she is. Probably more than she is. He walks towards the door, and is about to open it when she says, "I love you, yeah?"

Richie looks at her. He nods while he opens the door to greet the yellow hallway light, and leaves. He doesn't look back and releases a breath he didn't know he was holding.

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He spends the weekend mostly at the farm with Stan and Mike, or at the arcade. When he tells Mike, he just says, "That's rough, buddy," before Richie replies with, "It really isn't."

They share a bottle of vodka and binge Star Wars, laugh themselves silly. It's nice. Richie even goes to a party Saturday and set the record straight about the whole not wanting pity thing. He thinks its starting to get better, and wakes up Monday morning with a bit of hope, despite it being Monday.

But just like that day in the parking lot, Eddie Kaspbrak comes crashing through that happiness with his Subaru. Or, more appropriately, a giant truck.

Richie even started off that morning eating breakfast. Breakfast! It was Eggo waffles, sure, but breakfast all the same. He's stuffing his backpack on the counter, waffle in his mouth when his Dad comes in

with a pile of mail.

“Letter for you, Richie,” he says, tossing an envelope on the counter, and sits down at the dining table to eat his oatmeal. Richie frowns. He usually doesn’t get anything in the mail besides Amazon packages. He can’t remember the last time he got an honest to god letter. Perhaps when he was like eight, and he got a thank you note from Jim Sullivan for getting him a nerf gun for his birthday?

He studies the envelope. It’s white, except for decorative diagonal blue and red stripes on the left side. There’s his name written in neat, cursive handwriting. There’s no return address.

Richie opens it, trying to read it as quickly as possible so he can get to school on time for once. He frowns again when he notices it’s dated as being written three years ago when he was in eighth grade. What the hell?

*Dear Richie,*

*First of all, I refuse to call you Tozier. You think you’re so cool, going by your last name all of a sudden. Just so you know, Tozier sounds like that one-hit wonder singer from Sweden, or wherever the fuck. But with “toe” in front of it.*

*Did you know that when you kissed me, I would finally realize how much I love you? Sometimes I think yes. Definitely yes. You know why? Because you think EVERYONE loves you, Richie. That’s what I hate about you. Because everyone does love you. Including me. But I love you so much, it’s tiring, and I don’t think I want to anymore.*

*Here are all your worst qualities:*

*1. You’re obnoxious and loud and think that’s charming. Pro-tip for you: it isn’t. And if people don’t think it’s charming, who cares, right? Wrong! You do care. You care a lot about what people think of you. I can tell.*

*2. You always take the last piece of pizza. You never ask if anyone else wants it. That’s rude.*

*3. You kissed me for no reason. Even though I’m a boy, and when Bowers and his cronies heard about it, they called me a fag and a fairy for the*

*rest of the year; but of course, you didn't think about that, because they didn't bully you nearly as much as they bullied me. Even though you knew you were dating Lace, and I knew you were dating Lace, and everyone else did. But you still did it. Just because you could. It doesn't matter if it was spin the bottle, you could have told Betty to spin the bottle again, and everyone would have listened to you. Just like they always do.*

*Here's what I really want to know: Why would you do that to me? My first kiss was supposed to be something special. I've read about it, what it's supposed to feel like—fireworks and lightning bolts and the sound of waves crashing in your ears. I didn't have any of that. Thanks to you it was as unspecial as a kiss could be. The worst part of it is, that stupid nothing kiss is what made me really start to like you. Like, like you. I never thought about it before, even when I stared at you across the hallways. Bev has always said that you are the best-looking boy in our grade, and I agreed, because sure, you are. But plenty of people are good-looking. That doesn't make them interesting or intriguing or cool.*

*Maybe that's why you kissed me. To do mind control on me, to make me see you that way. It worked. Your little trick worked. From then on, I saw you. Up close, your face wasn't so much handsome as beautiful. How many beautiful boys have you ever seen? For me, it was just one. You. I think it's a lot to do with your mouth. You have unsettlingly pretty, red lips. Unfairly pretty.*

*Even though you don't deserve it, fine, I'll go into all the things I like about you:*

- 1. One time in science, nobody wanted to be partners with Eddie Corcoran because he has BO, and you volunteered like it was no big deal. Suddenly everybody thought Eddie wasn't so bad.*
- 2. You signed my yearbook in third grade, even though you had no reason to, and I was being totally embarrassing. You also called me adorable, and I sort of liked that.*
- 3. You're still in chorus, even though all the other boys take band and orchestra now. You even sing solos. And you dance, and you're not embarrassed.*
- 4. You were the last boy to get tall. And now you're the tallest, but it's like*

*you earned it. Also, when you were short, no one even cared that you were short—the girls still liked you and the boys still picked you first for basketball in gym.*

*It hasn't been easy, watching you with Lace, holding hands and making out on the bus. You probably make her feel very special. Because that's your talent, right? You're good at making people feel special. Do you know what it's like to like someone so much you can't stand it and know that they'll never feel the same way? Probably not. People like you don't have to suffer through those kinds of things.*

*And now that the year is almost over, I know for sure that I have to be over you by the start of freshman year, for my own sanity. I'll be really proud to say I'll be the only one in this school immunized to the charms of Richie Tozier. All because I had a really bad dose of you in seventh grade and most of eighth. Then I would never ever have to worry about catching you again. What a relief! I bet if I did ever kiss you again, I would definitely catch something, and it wouldn't be love. It would be an STD!*

*Sincerely,*

*Eddie Frank Kaspbrak*

*...Oh, shit.*

### 3. fAkE dAtInG au owo

### Summary for the Chapter:

both Richie and Eddie get angry as fuuuckkk

Freshman year, Richie's friends crashed a party. They hadn't before, but Richie didn't see the big deal. There were juniors and seniors there, so what? He was more concerned with the fact there was going to be alcohol. He'd been thinking about it all day since his mom had told him not to drink too much because "You weigh like, two pounds."

Three hours later, he stumbled upstairs to get a bottle of water, feeling more than a little buzzed, and a bit like he was about to throw up all over Kyle Hanscom's fancy hallway carpet. Richie reached the kitchen, hoping to find a sweet bar stool to chug water on alone, when he saw it was occupied by a blonde kid. Reading a book. When a fucking party was going on right beneath their feet.

“Well this is the saddest fucking sight I’ve ever seen.”

The kid looks up from...Richie squints. Jesus. It's "Oedipus Rex." Some part of Richie's mind knows that his English class is reading that right now, but he'd opened the first page and never looked at the thing again. And this bitch is reading it on a Saturday night?? At a party???? Of his own free will?????

[illegible]

Anyways, as he was saying, this dood looks up from fucking Oedipus Rex and throws an annoyed look Richie's way.

“Huh?” the kid asks.

“Well,” Richie says, “It’s just that there’s a party going on downstairs and you’re just, like...up here reading a shitty book.”

The kid looks so offended its would be funny if Richie wasn't trying to find some water. Damn his natural ability to attract social interactions with his wonderful charms! He walks to the refrigerator

and opens it.

“Actually, Oedipus Rex is considered one of the greatest tragedies of all time by modern writers and critics.” No dice. Nada. He moves over to the bar fridge he saw a sophomore open earlier. A silly thing, Richie thinks, to have two fridges. Was one not enough? Guess not.

“Oh yeah? Well, I tried to read it and it’s bullshit.”

“Yeah, I know.” No water in the mini fridge either. Just motherfucking spicy fruit seltzer water from hell that all those moms like to drink. Richie hears cheers from downstairs. Damnit, he better not be missing anything. If there’s one thing Richie can’t stand, it’s missing out.

“Hey, ya know if they got water here?” The kid sighs, grabs a glass from the cupboard, fills it up in the sink, and slides it across the counter. Richie, standing in the threshold of the entrance to the basement, wrinkled his nose. “I didn’t mean tap water, ew.” But he picks it up and swigs it back anyway while the kid goes back to his book.

“Wait, what do you mean you know?” Richie says while taking a breath and wiping his mouth. The kid looks up in confusion.

“We’re in the same English class...remember? You made that big scene to Ms. Casey about your um, thoughts on the book.”

“Oh yeah. Ben, right?” When the kid nods, realization dawns through the fuzziness of Richie’s brain. “Hey, your brother’s hosting this party!”

“Don’t remind me.”

“What, so your big brothers partying downstairs, and you’re up here doing homework?”

Ben sighs again and puts the book to the side. Richie registers that Ben may have to deal with that a lot, the comparison to his brother, and feels bad. “Look, if you’re going to be like that, could you just go downstairs?” Ben says.

“No way, Jose. I’m not going back down there without you.”

Richie goes to the sink. It’s a fancy one, “a real classy piece,” as his mother, with her bullshit interior design magazines, would say. He opens the window above it, and before Ben can blink, tosses good old Oedipus Rexie into the bushes outside. Ben stares with his mouth agape. “I have to read that for class!”

“Not tonight, you do,” Richie replies. He tugs on Ben’s arm to get off the stool with a mischievous glint in his eye. “Come on haystack, I wanna get some beer in you before the night is through.”

Ben stares at him a moment. “Has anyone ever told you you have zero impulse control?”

Richie doesn’t answer until they’re in the basement headed toward the cooler. “Once or twice.”

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Richie thinks about that night as he makes his way towards the track surrounding the football field, because Haystack’s comment is pretty relevant to the stupid thing he’s about to do. Ben was actually the only person to tell him that. Well, besides Richie’s parents; but with Ben it seemed like it meant more than just an annoyed scolding.

After reading the letter, which he has had folded neatly and tucked in the front pocket of his jacket all day, Richie got to school as fast as he could, even managed to get there ten minutes early, which was a first for him. He searched all of the places he had seen Eddie hang out outside of class, ever: the bleachers, the library, the bathroom outside the arts wing nobody went in, the benches at the edge of the woods surrounding school. He even skipped first period to peek in classrooms, but still no sign of Eddie.

After a wasted lunch period spent searching, Richie resolved to simply stay after school to see if Eddie showed up at track practice.

Thus, at 3:45 pm, Richie made his way across the soccer field towards the bumpy red track surrounding the football field. He’d even went to the boys locker rooms first, but all the track guys in



there said Eddie had already left.

“Little nerd always changes 15 minutes early so he can get there on time,” Moose Sadler snickered as he tied his shoes. Richie had to try really hard from replying to that, because he didn’t have the time to get in an argument with Sadler at the moment.

As the sun, which had no business being this hot, beat down on him, he ran ahead of some other students making their way to the field as fast as he could. Some people gave him weird looks, either because he was bumping into people while sprinting as fast as he could past the bleachers, or because he was wheezing an embarrassing amount, in which case, Richie would take some offense.

Technically the fall play and winter musical counted for his athletic requirements, so he hadn’t done a proper sport since eighth grade gym class. Give him a break.

He finally, FINALLY reaches the chainlink fence with the gate leading to the track and field and barges through it. There’s Coach Watson sitting on the bench on his phone, there’s some track players stretching, squeezing communal gatorade bottles till water streams into their open mouths. And there, next to a hurdle, fiddling with his watch and a annoyed expression on his face is...

“Hey! Eddie!” A startled expression, a finger pointing at his chest. “Me?” Eddie mouthed. “No, Edward Cullen. Yes, you! Could we talk for a minute?”

Eddie narrows his eyes at him, but doesn’t say anything. Which is good, because then it would be expected for Richie to respond to whatever he said, and Richie feels too shocked to speak again. The sun is behind Eddie, forming a halo around his perfect hair, his jogging shorts are so short it should be considered a crime, showing off his tan, freckled thighs perfectly.

Snap out of it, Richie, he thinks. You’re mad, remember? So pissed off you could scream?

“Sure,” Eddie replies shrugging. “Practice doesn’t technically start for another ten minutes anyway.”

The two of them end up on the pathway behind the bleachers, a far enough distance away from the gate so that hopefully nobody would hear them. As Eddie leans against the fence, looking at Richie expectantly, Richie takes a deep breath and reaches to take the letter from his jacket.

“Listen, I’m flattered and everything, but it’s never gonna happen.”

Eddie raises an eyebrow and actually looks angry for a second before saying, “I... excuse me?”

“It’s a really cute gesture, and I think it’s sweet you think I have nice lips and all, it’s just...” Richie doesn’t really know how to continue.

When he finished re-reading Eddie’s letter for the tenth time, he wasn’t sure how to feel. Some part of him fluttered as his eyes scanned over *“I love you so much it’s tiring,”* and *“Do you know what it’s like to like someone so much you can’t stand it and know that they’ll never feel the same way?”*

Yet the other part of him was frustrated and angry. Why did Eddie decide to mail this now? Because he and Lace broke up again? That didn’t mean he could just come in here with his cute little middle school love letter and expect to just win Richie over.

A choked sound from Eddie brought Richie back to the present. He saw Eddie was looking down at the letter in Richie’s hand with comically wide eyes. Richie ran his free hand through his curly hair and continued, “I mean, Lace and I just broke up, and I don’t even know what you hoped to accomplish by-”

Whatever Richie was going to say next was cut off by the sound of Eddie’s body hitting the pavement.

“Jesus! Eddie? Eds!” Richie cries as he bends down to study the passed out form of Eddie Kaspbrak. “Eddie, come on man, wake up!”

Richie’s able to breathe again when he sees the flutter of Eddie’s unnaturally long eyelashes. When he drearly opens his eyes a crack, Richie’s collapses down beside him. In the corner of Richie’s eye, Eddie sits up rubbing his face. “Wha- what happen?”

“You passed out, dude. Took a total snooze fest on me there for like a solid minute.”

Richie watches as the memory comes back to Eddie, through the re-widening of his eyes and that beautiful blush coloring his face red. He looks away from Richie, out towards the direction of the school before Richie hears a sharp intake of breath.

“Oh my god.” The way Eddie says it isn’t in a shocked tone really, more like complaining. More along the lines of ‘why me?’ “Oh my god,” Eddie says again.

Richie is sitting up, about to ask what the big deal is when he’s getting pushed down again, Eddie’s lips pushing harshly against Richie’s mouth, and oh gee, Richie thinks, so this is happening now!

It lasts all about two seconds, but for Richie it feels like two years. When Eddie pulls away, looking down at Richie with messed up hair and those flushed cheeks, he blurts out a tiny “Sorry!” before getting and bolting away from Richie as fast as his little legs can take him.

Richie feels the burning need to run after him and demand an explanation (it’s not like it would be hard to catch up) but something keeps him rooted to his spot in the black asphalt. That something is the sight of Bill Denbrough, looking not at Richie from his spot on the soccer field, but at the back of Eddie who had just ran past him, holding a light blue envelope in his left hand.

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It doesn’t mean anything. That’s what Richie tells himself as he climbs into Gertha (his truck, which Mike had been kind enough to bless with a name recently). Just because Bill, Eddie’s best friend, who Eddie was clearly running away from, was holding a letter doesn’t mean that he also got an intimate love letter. What would Eddie gain from sending two different guys that type of information at the same time? He’s reading too much into this. Definitely.

Richie heads the car towards his house. He has some weed in the pillowcase he doesn’t sleep on, but puts on the floor at night. He just needs to calm down, stop fidgeting, and the easiest way he’s found to

do that is to get high. So naturally when he gets to his room it's gone. Richie is worried for a split second his Mom found it when cleaning his room, but calms down when he realizes she would have said something by now. Texted him, or whatever. Last time, when she found cigarettes in his closet, he got a thing of ten text within a minute, letting him know he was in for it when he got home.

Blow back wasn't too bad, though. His mom had busted a nut, but dad had been a smoker during high school and most of college, so he'd been a bit more understanding. Richie had gotten his computer taken away, plus was forced to go to some reform AA thing at the church for two months that he'd skipped more often than not.

Richie ends up parking Gertha on Main Street, and gets out to head towards the drug store to swipe a pack of mint Marlboros. In the meantime all he can do to calm the pain in his stomach is walk so fast he can't think. Not about the letter weighing him down in his front pocket. Not about the images that flash through his brain like they're on a projector screen.

Bill holding an envelope at his side, with handwriting on it that, just from a distance, looks like Eddie's neat scrawl. *Click*. Lace curled on her side while twisting her hair in between her fingers. *Click*. Eddie with a look of horror coming over his face. *Click*. Eddie's angry little face from the driver's window. *Click*. Eddie clutching a yearbook to his chest. *Click*. Eddie, Eddie, Eddie. Okay, so maybe speed walking wasn't the most effective method.

He nearly runs into a power pole when he sees it. Eddie's bike, popping out as always with it's brightly colored bells and ribbons adorning the handlebars, propped against the side of the Silver Dollar Diner. And just like that, all thoughts of cigarettes are out of Richie's mind. Smoking? Who's that? Never heard of her.

He rushes across the street without even checking to see if it's green or not (it isn't, as this old man is kind enough to tell him after punching the brakes on his Volvo), and throws all his weight on the diner entrance door, before realizing it's a pull door.

The diner is practically empty when he comes in. Richie wants to burst out laughing when he sees Eddie at the counter punching one

of those plastic straws on the counter in an attempt to force the paper off it. He's so cute he makes Richie want to die. Instead of meeting his early demise he quietly slips into the stool two seats away from Eddie, clears his throat.

"Hey, Kaspbrak." Richie internally winces as his voice doesn't clearly come out nearly as suave as he hoped it would, given the fact that Eddie quickly looks back at his drink. They sit there like like, in COMPLETE SILENCE for maybe a minute, Richie staring at Eddie, Eddie staring at the bubbles rising to the surface of his coke, until a waitress comes up behind the counter.

"Your friend want anything?" she says to Eddie, who just sits there. Looking at his coke. Richie gives her his most dazzling smile.

"I sure do..," Richie squints at her name-tag. "Florence? I'd like a chocolate milkshake." She nods and leaves. Richie almost wants her to stay, if only for the fact that it will keep the awkward quiet with Eddie at bay.

However, sometimes people surprise you. "What are you doing here, anyway?" Eddie turns to him, his eyes flashing in a way that probably was meant to be scary, but to Richie just looked adorable. He suppressed a snort.

"Well, I hear their chocolate shakes here are out of this world."

"Oh, haha. What are you actually doing here?" Ok, not in the mood for jokes. Got it.

Richie shrugged. "I was walking downtown and I saw your bike outside. Wanted to set some things straight with you." When Eddie doesn't say anything, Richie continues. "Look, I'm flattered. I really am. But I just broke up with Lace, and-"

"Are you serious right now?" Yes. Maybe. "Listen asshole," Eddie says, "I don't need your whole nice guy rejection act right now, alright? I'm not trying to get with you or anything. It's not like that."

Richie can't help but smirk as he pulls the letter out from his jacket. "You say that now, but that's not what you wrote in this letter," he

teases, waving the paper above his head. A dark expression comes to Eddie's face, and he knows he's made a mistake when Eddie lunges across the stools, one arm pushing against Richie's face and the other reaching for the letter. Thank god the dude seems to have grown zero inches since fifth grade, because otherwise Richie would have had the cutest letter ever stolen from him. The horror!

When Eddie finally realizes Richie's too tall for him, he sits back with a huff. The waitress comes by and slides his milkshake across towards him before heading back to the kitchen. "Fuck you, dude. You should know I wrote that letter years ago, and it wasn't even supposed to get mailed to you in the first place." Okay, now Richie's confused.

"Well it got mailed to me. Clearly. And if you don't like me, why did you kiss me on the track?"

Eddie actually blushes at that. "I have an explanation for that," he blurts out quickly. "I needed to make it look like I liked you so someone else wouldn't think I liked them."

Richie raises an eyebrow at that, while inside his heart sinks. "Oh, okay. Interesting way to go about it. Okay, who?"

"What?" Eddie asks.

"You gotta tell me who this mystery man is or else I'll go the rest of my life thinking you've got a secret tattoo of my face your ass." Richie exclaims, heart doing backflips when Eddie give him a look of disgust.

"No. Just, no." Richie was expecting that, but it still hurts.

"Fine, then I'll just have to tell the whole school you wrote me a love letter." Richie knows he's fucked up for the second time within a few minutes when Eddie looks terrified and his breathing starts to get wheezy.

"Shit, that was the wrong thing to say, wasn't it?" Eddie fumbles around his bag looking for something. "Look, I'm so sorry. Tell me what to do," Richie begs as Eddie pulls out an inhaler. There's a little shake before Eddie takes a hit from it and his breathing ceases

altogether, for a moment. Only for a moment.

"You're such a bastard," Eddie snaps. "Do you even know what they do to gay people around here?"

"You don't have to tell me," Richie murmurs as he fidgets in his seat. "I really am sorry," he says again.

Eddie fiddles with his coke straw. "I don't want to hear it. You're really so desperate to learn who I like? It's Bill Denbrough."

Fuck. Richie bites his lip until it bleeds before stating, "Denbrough? Wait, isn't he dating your sister?"

"Dated. Past tense. They broke up a few days ago. So I can't have him thinking I still like him after he got my letter, because then things would just get way to complicated."

Richie waves his hands in front of himself with narrowed eyes. "Wait, hold on, stop, stop, stop. I'm not the only Kaspbrak Love Letter recipient?" Richie puts on an exaggerated pout, even while his insides are melting from frustration. Of course he isn't.

"Of course you aren't. I wrote five letters." Eddie says sharply.

"Wow, you go around thinking you're special until it turns out he's got four other side hoes. Who knew you were such a player?" Richie replies.

"I'm not. Like I said, I just wrote the letters, I never wanted them to get out," Eddie explains as Richie licks the whipped cream off the cherry on top. Then a confused expression comes over his face. "Wait, who says you aren't a side hoe? What is Ben's my main partner?"

Richie chokes on whipped cream. "Ben? Ben Hanscom? You wrote a letter to Haystack?"

Eddie's eyes widen as he realizes what he said. "What if I did?" he demands.

"Well, for one thing, I'm fairly certain he's straight."

“Why?”

“He’s had the hots for your pal Bev for like, ever.”

“So? He could be bi.”

“What’s that?”

Eddie blinks. He pinches himself in his arm, like those people on TV who are checking to see if they’re dreaming. “I’m sorry, you’ve never heard of being bisexual?!” Eddie practically yells.

Richie shakes his head. Eddie mutters something under his breath that sounds suspiciously like “this fucking town,” but he can’t be sure. What he is sure of is that Eddie looks like he’s leaving. He puts a five dollar bill on the counter and gathers his stuff after sitting up.

“Wait, wait-are you leaving?” Eddie gestures to himself as if to say, obviously. “Do you want a ride home in my truck?”

Eddie glares at him. “Not in a million years.”

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Six minutes later, Richie is pulling up to the Phillips residence and it looks like another cringe inducing silence is about to occur when Eddie says, “I’m sorry. About the whole kissing you thing.”

Richie looks over at him with a lazy smile. “It’s alright. Coulda been worse, as far as kisses go.” Eddie looks out the window at his house, but still hasn’t got out of the car yet. “What are you gonna tell Denbrough?”

“I don’t know,” Eddie says with a shrug. “The truth, I guess.”

“Which is?” Richie inquires. “I mean, do you like him, do you not like him?” Richie praying it’s the latter. He just doesn’t think Bill and Eddie would be all that good for each other, you know?

Eddie smiles weakly and gets out of the car. “It’s not really your problem, Richie.”



Richie sits in the front seat as Eddie digs his bike out from the trunk, mulling that over. *You know he's right*, Richie tells himself. *You should just drive away. Study for that English test and put the letter in your desk somewhere.*

Fuck that.

Richie hops out of the car and strides over to Eddie, who's putting his bike on the porch before he can stop himself. "Hey! Hold on!" he calls. Eddie looks up.

"What if you didn't tell him?" Richie says, leaning against the front porch bannister, the stupid idea already forming in his mind.

"What?"

Richie closes his eyes and cringes internally before saying, "What if we let people think we were actually together? Just for a little while?" His words tumble out as the gears turn in his mind, faster than he can speak. "And not just Denbrough, everybody."

Eddie's jaw drops. "Are you kidding me? After what I just said in the restaurant about gay people in Derry, and stuff? Why would you want that?"

Richie takes a deep breath. "I need to let Lace know it's over for good. We've broken up so many times and then gotten back together, but I want to move past that. Maybe seeing me with a guy will help convey the message."

Eddie's eyes narrow and he looks like he wants his stare to drill holes into Richie's head. "Oh so you wanna out me to the entire homophobic school just so you can use me as your pawn in a fight with your girlfriend?" Okay, when you say it like that, Richie really is being an asshole.

"It sounded better in my head," he admits. "Look, you don't wanna ruin your relationship with Audra, have I got that right? It seems like you care a lot more about your relationship with her than your relationship with this shitty town we'll all leave behind come graduation. I'm not gonna force you into it, and you don't have to

reply right away, just...think on it yeah?"

Eddie fiddles with the loose string of his shirt. He gives Richie a small nod, saying, "Don't hold your breath," before marching into his house with his head held high and slamming the door shut.

Richie worryingly makes his way towards Gertha when he spots the man of the hour, Big Bill Denbrough, pulling the garbage cans to the end of his driveway across the street. "Yo, Denbrough!" he yells, unable to help himself. He sees Bill's eyes narrow.

"Hey, Tozier. You taking Eddie home?"

"Yup," Richie says, making sure his lips pop on the Y.

"How long have you been ha-ha-hanging out?"

Richie opens the door of his truck with a smirk. "Not long. Not long at all."

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

here she be